

Volume 05 Issue 2

September 12, 2005

The Navigator

Waukesha County Veterans' Services

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FEDERAL, STATE & LOCAL BENEFITS UPDATE

NEWS UPDATE FOR FEDERAL BENEFITS



DoD to Notify Gulf War Vets on Latest Chem Agents Study By Sgt. 1st Class Doug Sample, USA American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 27, 2005 – The Defense Department is again sending letters to thousands of Gulf War veterans exposed to low levels of chemical agents contained in munitions destroyed at a weapons depot in Khamisiyah, Iraq, in March 1991.

A study released this week by the Institute of Medicine here concluded that veterans possibly exposed in that area appear to have a higher risk for brain cancer death than veterans who were not exposed. However, the study's authors said more research is needed to confirm their findings.

This letter is the third DoD is sending to update Gulf War veterans possibly exposed. Letters also were sent in 1997 and 2000 to inform veterans about developments.

Dr. Michael E. Kilpatrick, DoD's deputy director for deployment health support, said the purpose of the latest letters is to notify veterans whose units were in the possible hazard areas about the study and to remind them of medical services the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs can provide.

He said the letters won't recommend that veterans take any specific action, but will inform them on what to do if they feel affected. "If they feel fine, they don't need to do anything," he said. "We don't want them to get highly con-

cerned about this study. It is a preliminary finding, and we will continue to investigate to better understand what this may or may not mean for their health."

Kilpatrick noted this is the first study saying there is a possibility of a long-term health effect. "We do not have 'cause and effect' relationship at this point," he said. "But we do want the veterans to know that this data is there, and we want them to know from us that we are committed continuing the investigation to follow-up, because we are concerned about their health."

The Defense Department first prompted the study in 1997 after it was learned that rockets and other munitions destroyed at Khamisiyah in 1991 contained nerve agents sarin and cyclosarin. During the study, Kilpatrick said, IOM researchers compared the causes of death in a group of 100,487 possibly exposed U.S. Army Gulf War veterans with those among 224,980 Army Gulf War veterans who were not exposed to nerve agents released during the demolitions.

He said the study found no difference in overall mortality or all cancer mortality.

Still, the study showed that exposed veterans were about twice as likely to have died from brain cancer as unex-

(Continued on page 5 - Gulf War Vets)

COMMENTARY CORNER By: John L. Margowski, Director

In past commentaries I have discussed the need for Congress to provide adequate funding for the VA System. Recent actions by Congress have provided a temporary "fix" financially, for the medical side of the VA System. The fix this year does not address any future budget "shortfalls" that may arise.

In the same vein, there is also a budget shortfall on the Administrative side of the VA which processes and handles veterans' claims. The Regional Offices are short staffed and claims processing times are increasing. The delays in processing of all types of claims means longer waits for compensation and pension exams to be ordered, and a significant time delay in the awarding of compensation and pension benefits to veterans and their dependents and survivors. Veterans Groups and individual veterans must continue to press their legislators for adequate mandatory funding of the entire VA system.

The Wisconsin State Budget is now law. The adjustments and

changes in Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) programs are now enacted and implementation instructions are being formulated. There were some decreases in veterans programs at the State level dictated by the need to stabilize and protect the Veterans' Trust Fund. In the same budget there were many good "new" items contained that provide expanded benefits to veterans, their dependents and survivors. Overall, a very positive year for Wisconsin veterans budget wise.

When you go to the Legislative Salute in Madison in early 2006, be sure to thank your legislators for their efforts in expanding Wisconsin Veterans Programs.

We are still receiving a significant number of claims from Vietnam veterans for Diabetes Mellitus Type II (adult onset) and medical conditions secondary to the diabetes. If you know a Vietnam veteran who has Adult Onset Diabetes and they served in-country Vietnam, and they have not filed a claim for service condition, have them contact their County Veterans Service Office for assistance with getting the benefits they deserve.

Our dedication of the monuments in front of the Courthouse held on June 5, 2005 was well received by the members of Company B, 188th Medical Battalion. I wish that more veterans could have turned out to

welcome them home and thank them for their service to this country. The City Allied Veterans' Council was a big help with donations and volunteers to help with the event. Thanks to all who helped.

Company B, 2nd Battalion, 28th Infantry, out of Oconomowoc has now been activated. After two months of training they will be deployed overseas. That Unit will also be inscribed on our monument, (their 4th deployment during a time of war – Mexican Border, WWI, WWII.) We hope to have an event for them when they return. I will be reaching out to the Oconomowoc veterans groups to help with that event.

It has been several years since I asked Posts to advise me if they have a new Veterans' Memorial in their area. If you do please contact my office. I would like to come out and take pictures of the memorial and complete a data sheet about it. I then forward the information to the Wisconsin Dept. of Veterans for inclusion in their database. The information is then available on line.

Just as a reminder, I am available to come to your veterans group or civic group to give presentations on Federal and State Veterans Benefits and answer any questions that your members may have. Give my office a call to discuss a time and date with me and to arrange a presentation.



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***"The Navigator" is published by:
The Waukesha County Veterans' Service Office.***

If you have any questions or comments about the contents of the newsletter, please contact Waukesha County Veterans' Service Office at 262-548-7732.

VA, Army Sign Walter Reed Training Pact

The following information was found on the internet <http://www.va.opa/pressrel/>

WASHINGTON (June 6, 2005) - Leaders of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Walter Reed Army Medical Center signed an agreement today giving severely injured service members practical help landing civilian jobs.

"Our newest generation of combat heroes deserves the best this nation can offer," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "But what they want is a helping hand, not a hand-out."

Under the "Vet IT" agreement signed by Nicholson and the Walter Reed commander, Army Maj. Gen. Kenneth L. Farmer Jr., VA will offer voca-

tional training and temporary jobs at its Washington headquarters to service members recovering at the Army facility from traumatic injuries.

More than 30 Walter Reed patients have already received similar on-the-job experience at VA headquarters since a test of the program began in September 2004. So far, 15 have been hired permanently by VA.

VA is the nation's second-largest Cabinet Department, and one of the nation's largest employers of disabled veterans, with about 20,000 disabled workers among its workforce of more than 230,000.

With a current budget of more than \$68 billion, VA gives health care to more than 5.2 million patients yearly and provides monthly disability compensation to nearly 2.7 million veterans, while operating 120 national cemeteries, providing educational assistance to nearly 500,000 and administering insurance programs that cover more than 7.2 million beneficiaries.

"As VA enters its 75th anniversary year, I'm proud that our new Vet IT program continues our long tradition of helping disabled veterans through vocational training and educational benefits," said Secretary Nicholson.

VA Gives \$1 Million Grant for Wisconsin Veterans Home

The following information was found on the internet <http://www.va.gov>

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded a grant of \$1 million to the state of Wisconsin on Aug. 2 to renovate the well water system at the state veterans home in King.

"This grant honors our commitment to care for the men and women who have served in uniform," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "Our federal-state partnership helps to provide a comfortable home for some Wisconsin veterans during a time of personal need."

The \$1 million grant will pay

up to 65 percent of the cost of the water supply renovation at King. Overall cost of the project is estimated at \$1.5 million.

Wisconsin operates veterans homes at King and Union Grove. The homes are available to veterans who served on active duty for two or more years or for the full period of their initial service obligation, whichever is less. Veterans must have lived in Wisconsin for 12 consecutive months and have honorable discharges or they must have been a Wisconsin resident at the time of

their entry into the military.

In fiscal year 2004, VA spent over \$1.1 billion in Wisconsin to serve more than 474,000 veterans who live in the state. VA operates major medical centers in Madison, Milwaukee and Tomah with outpatient clinics and Vet Centers in many locations. VA health care was provided to 102,091 people in Wisconsin during 2004.

Further information about Wisconsin's veterans homes is available on the web at <http://dva.state.wi.us/homes.asp>.

Federal Grants Awarded for State Veterans' Homes at King and Union Grove—\$5.5 Million for Food Service Renovations

The following information was found on the internet <http://www.va.gov>



Affairs awarded WDVA two federal grants for renovating food service facilities to utilize a new cook-chill method of preparing and serving meals to residents at the Wisconsin Veterans Homes at King and Union Grove.

In letters this week from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Deputy Secretary Gordon H. Mansfield, federal VA assistance totaling close to \$5.5 million was awarded to renovate the Food Service Facility at the Home in King, and the Dietary Facility at the Southern Wisconsin Center in Union Grove. The grant awards provide for reimbursement to the state for up to 65 percent of total actual costs of construction for each facility.

"Wisconsin is proud of our programs to ensure our state's veterans receive the benefits, services, and care they have earned and deserve," said Secretary Scocos. "These federal grants will help ensure a cook-chill food service system that will increase efficiency and reduce operational costs, while providing superior food quality to veterans and their spouses who are residents of the homes."

(MADISON) Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) Secretary John A. Scocos announced today that the U.S. Department of Veterans

Currently, both state veterans homes utilize a cook-serve technology of food production. At King, all food is prepared and served from the Home's food service facility located in the Central Services Building constructed in 1965. Food is trayed, transported, and served immediately after being prepared.

"The renovation of the food service facility at King involves redesigning the kitchen with a more efficient work flow, and will update refrigeration, mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems to meet food sanitation and building codes," said Scocos. "Food prepared at the King Home will also be supplied to residents of the Union Grove Home. The

federal grants will assist the department in renovating food service facilities at both locations to produce meals using new technology for over 870 residents at King and Union Grove Homes."

Kitchen remodeling similar to the renovations at King are estimated to take from 15 to 21 months.

Estimated cost savings of the new cook-chill method are \$500,000 per year.



VA Gives \$13 Million Grant for Wisconsin Veterans' Home

The following information was found on the internet <http://www.va.gov>

WASHINGTON (April 27, 2005) - Veterans in Wisconsin will have greater access to long-term health care, thanks to a \$13 million grant announced today by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to build a state nursing home and activities center in Union Grove.

"This grant honors our commitment to care for the men and women who have served in uniform," said Secretary of Veterans

Affairs Jim Nicholson. "Our federal-state partnership will provide a comfortable home for Wisconsin's veterans in a time of great personal need."

The \$13 million grant will pay up to 65 percent of the cost to construct and equip a 120-bed state veterans home and activities center in Union Grove. Overall cost of the project is estimated at \$20 million.

Wisconsin also operates a Veterans Home in Waupaca County. The home is available to veterans who served on active duty for two or more years or the full period of their initial service obligation, whichever is less. Residents must have lived in Wisconsin for 12 consecutive months and have honorable discharges or been a Wisconsin resident at the time of entry into military service.

VA Gives \$264,000 Grant for Wisconsin Veterans Home

The following information was found on the internet <http://www.va.gov>

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded a grant of \$264,344 to the state of Wisconsin on Aug. 2 to renovate the ventilation system at the state veterans home in King.

"This grant honors our commitment to care for the men and women who have served in uniform," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "Our federal-state partnership helps to provide a comfortable home for some Wisconsin veterans during a time of personal need."

The grant will pay up to 65 percent of the cost of the renovation at the King facility. Overall cost of the project is estimated at more than \$400,000.

Wisconsin operates veterans homes at King and Union Grove. The homes are available to veterans who served on active duty for two or more years or

for the full period of their initial service obligation, whichever is less. Veterans must have lived in Wisconsin for 12 consecutive months and have honorable discharges or they must have been a Wisconsin resident at the time of their entry into the military.

In fiscal year 2004, VA spent over \$1.1 billion in Wisconsin to serve more than 474,000 veterans who live in the state. VA operates major medical centers in Madison, Milwaukee and Tomah, with outpatient clinics and Vet Centers in many locations. VA health care was provided to 102,091 people in Wisconsin during 2004.

Further information about Wisconsin's veterans homes is available on the Internet at <http://dva.state.wi.us/Homes.asp>.

(Gulf War Vets—Continued from page 1)

posed veterans, corresponding to roughly 12 excess deaths due to brain cancer among the 100,487 exposed veterans over a nine-year period.

Kilpatrick said that finding has puzzled researchers, because neither sarin nor cyclosarin is a known carcinogen. "Neither has been shown to cause cancer," he said. "It's too early to speculate as to what could cause the brain cancer among those in the study."

He noted that medical science has tied only one factor to brain cancer. "When you take a look at the causes of brain cancer, the only one that is really recognized is exposure to high levels of ionizing radiation," he said. "That doesn't mix with what our Gulf War veterans were exposed to in the Gulf War."

He also pointed out that the length of time between the possible exposure and illness among the exposed Gulf War veterans is much less than is usual for development of brain cancer. "This period is generally 15 to 20 years for brain cancer. This study has only evaluated the first nine years after this possible exposure," he said.

Kilpatrick said a lot more research needs to be done before any conclusion can be drawn on whether chemical agents at the site can be linked to brain cancer among Gulf War veterans. He said he emphasized that the notifications are part of the Defense Department's commitment to keeping veterans informed about health issues related to their deployment.

"The message is that we care about our veterans' health, and we are continuing to investigate to try and understand what the long-term health effects are," he said. "We are working closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs to understand this issue, and as we get more information, we will continue to share it with those concerned."

Kilpatrick said one comforting aspect of the study is that the overall death rate from diseases, injuries and other causes for Gulf War veterans was similar between those whose units may have been exposed and those whose units were not.

"This study overall shows that the death rate of those in the Gulf is no different for military personnel," he said. "We have done other studies looking at death rate of those in the Gulf to those who didn't deploy, and it is the same in every aspect. So that is very comforting."

DoD Announces Criteria for Two New Campaign Medals

The following information was found on the Internet at: www.usmc.mil/marinelink/mcn2000.nsf/releaseview

WASHINGTON--The Department of Defense announced today the creation of two campaign medals for Afghanistan and Iraq.

Presidential Executive Order 13363 established the Afghanistan and Iraq campaign medals to recognize members, who made specific sacrifices and significant contributions in these areas of operation.

Service members authorized the Afghanistan Campaign Medal must have served in direct support of Operation Enduring Freedom on or after Oct. 24, 2001, to a future date to be determined by the Secretary of Defense or the cessation of the operation. The area of eligibility encompasses all land areas of the country of Afghanistan and all air spaces above the land.

Those authorized the Iraq Campaign Medal must have served in direct support of Operation Iraqi Freedom on or after March 19, 2003, to a future date to be determined by the Secretary of Defense or the cessation of the operation. The area of eligibility encompasses all land area of the country of Iraq, and the contiguous water area out to 12 nautical miles, and all air spaces above the land area of Iraq and above the contiguous water area out to 12 nautical miles.

Service members must have been assigned, attached or mobilized to units operating in these areas of eligibility for 30 consecutive days or for 60 non-consecutive days or meet one of the following criteria:

- ◆ Be engaged in combat during an armed engagement, regardless of the time in the area of eligibility; or
- ◆ While participating in an operation or on official duties, is wounded or injured and requires medical evacuation from the area of eligibility; or
- ◆ While participating as a regularly assigned air crewmember flying sorties into, out of, within or over the area of eligibility in direct support of the military operations; each day of operations counts as one day of eligibility.

Service members qualified for the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal by reasons of

service between Oct. 24, 2001, and April 30, 2005 in an area for which the Afghanistan Campaign Medal was subsequently authorized and between March 19, 2003, and Feb. 28, 2005, in an area for which the Iraq

Campaign Medal was subsequently authorized, shall remain qualified for that medal.

Upon application, any such service member may be awarded the Afghanistan or Iraq Campaign Medal in lieu of the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal for such service. No service member shall be entitled to all three medals for the same act, achievement or period of service.

The awarding authority for the Afghanistan and Iraq campaign medals shall be the prescribed by the member's respective military service regulations.

Both medals may be awarded posthumously.

Only one award of the Afghanistan Campaign Medal and Iraq Campaign Medal may be authorized for any individual. Service stars are not prescribed.

Individuals may receive both the medals if they meet the requirement of both awards; however, the qualifying period of service used to establish eligibility for one award cannot be used to justify eligibility for the other.

The Afghanistan Campaign Medal shall be positioned below the Kosovo Campaign Medal and above the Iraq Campaign Medal. The Iraq Campaign Medal shall be positioned below the Afghanistan Campaign Medal and above the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal.

Each military department will prescribe appropriate regulations for processing, awarding and wearing the medals and ribbons for their service members, to include application procedures for veterans, retirees and next-of-kin.



Gold Star Moms Open Door to Non-Citizens

The following information was found on the internet <http://www.va.opa.pressrel/>



DALLAS, Texas (AP) -- A group for mothers whose children died in war voted Monday to allow non-U.S. citizens to join, after coming under criticism for denying membership to a Filipina mother whose son was killed in Afghanistan. The 1929 charter of American Gold Star Mothers had prevented foreign citizens from joining. Earlier this year, the organization's 12-member executive board voted against changing the rule.

That prevented Ligaya Lagman, of Yonkers, New York, from joining, although she is a legal resident and her son, 27-year-old son Army Staff Sgt. Anthony Lagman, was a U.S. citizen. After hearing about her interest in joining, New York Gov. George Pataki and other lawmakers urged the group to change its rules.

"Quite simply, the loss a mother endures when her son or daughter makes the ultimate sacrifice for our nation -- is no less honorable or admirable because of her citizenship status," Pataki said Monday.

The change was approved unanimously Monday during the American Gold Star Mothers' annual convention in the Dallas area.

"This change to our constitution was the right thing to do, but we had to make the change the right way," said Judith Young, the group's new president.

More than 140 military service members who were not U.S. citizens have died in Iraq and Afghanistan. Legal residents who are not citizens have long served in the U.S. military.

NEWS UPDATE FOR MILITARY RETIRED PROGRAMS



DoD Announces One-Year Open Enrollment for SBP

The following information was found <http://dva.state.wi.us>

The Department of Defense announced today that military retirees, who opted out of some or all their Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) coverage, will have another opportunity to elect coverage during a one-year open enrollment period from Oct. 1, 2005 through Sept. 30, 2006.

Upon a retiree's death, SBP provides an annuity of up to 55 percent of the military retired pay. Until recently, the annuity for a surviving spouse age 62 or older was reduced to 35 percent to reflect the availability of Social Security benefits. This reduction will phase out by April 2008, and the full 55 percent benefit will be paid regardless of the spouse's age in accordance with the Fiscal 2005 National Defense Authorization Act.

Current non-participants will be able to elect any coverage they could have elected previously upon retiring from active service or upon receiving notification of eligibility for reserve retired pay at age 60.

If they have a reduced election, they may increase their coverage. A participant with child only coverage may add a spouse or former spouse to their cover-

age, and a member may add child coverage to spouse or former spouse coverage.

But those who took SBP coverage and later elected to terminate that coverage are not eligible to make an open enrollment election.

Open enrollment elections require a lump sum buy-in premium as well as future monthly premiums. The lump sum equates to all back premiums, plus interest, from the date of original eligibility to make an election plus any amount needed to protect the Military Retirement Fund. The latter amount applies almost exclusively to those paying fewer than seven years of back payments.

The lump sum buy-in premium can be paid over a two-year period. Monthly premiums for spouse or former spouse coverage will be 6.5 percent of the coverage elected, the same premium paid by those currently enrolled. Reserve component members under age 60 and not yet eligible for retired pay do not pay back premiums or interest, but must pay a monthly SBP premium "add-on"

once their retired pay starts.

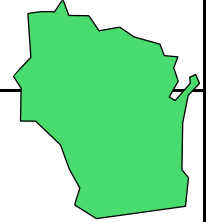
Elections are effective the first day of the month after the election is received, but no earlier than Oct. 1, 2005. An election is void if the retiree dies in the two years following an election and all premiums are refunded to the designated survivor.

To make an open enrollment election, a retiree must complete and submit a DD Form 2656-9, "Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) and Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan (RCSBP) Open Enrollment Election." The form is available electronically at www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/eforms/dd2656-9.pdf.

For assistance with the form, members should contact the retiree activities office for their service.

Mail the completed form to the address specified on the form. Applicants will be formally notified of their cost and have 30 days from the date of the notice to cancel the election by notifying the Defense Finance and Accounting Service or the reserve component, as applicable, in writing.

NEWS UPDATE FOR STATE BENEFITS



Governor Jim Doyle Announced the Appointment of Rodney Moen to the Board of Veterans Affairs.

The following information was received from www.wisgov.state.wi.us

"Rod Moen has proven himself as an outspoken advocate for Veterans' rights," Governor Doyle said. "He understands the issues confronting veterans and his experience in the State Senate will enable him to work with the legislature on those issues. He will work to ensure that Wisconsin veterans continue to enjoy the benefits of the nation's most comprehensive veterans program and he will ensure that Wisconsin remains a leader in the provision of benefits for our veterans."

The Board of Veterans Affairs supervises and directs the Department of Veterans Affairs and determines policy on veterans matters. The Board selects the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, who serves at the Board's pleasure. The seven members of the Board of Veterans Affairs serve staggered six-year terms.

"As a veteran, I look forward to serving on the Board of Veterans Affairs," Moen said.

When the Governor asked him to serve on the Board, he ac-

cepted the Governor's offer with a great deal of enthusiasm, he said.

"There is a wide range of issues facing the veterans of Wisconsin and access and affordability of health care is high on that list," Moen said.

Moen is a retired Naval Officer who served 22 years in the Navy, with 11 years enlisted and 11 years commissioned service. He is a Vietnam veteran. He served in-country Vietnam from March of 1967 to April of 1968. He retired from the U.S. Navy in 1976.

Moen is a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, Vietnam Veterans of America, and AmVets. Moen served in the Wisconsin State Senate from 1982 to 2002. He served as the Chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Utilities, and Veterans and Military Affairs.

He is a graduate of the University of Southern California. He and his wife, Jean, reside in Whitehall.

Assembly Bill 210 Signed by Governor Doyle Re-codifies State Veterans-Related Statutes

The following information was received from www.wisgov.state.wi.us

(MADISON) -- Governor Jim Doyle today signed into law AB 210, legislation that re-codifies the chapter of the state statutes dealing with state veterans programs and services.

"The re-codification of Wisconsin's veterans-related statutes provided by this bill was urgently needed," said Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary John A. Scocos, "and we greatly appreciate the efforts of the Legislature and Governor Doyle in passing and enacting this legislation."

"Multiple definitions of the term 'veteran', antiquated terminology dating back nearly 100 years or more, and the cumulative effect of generations of amendments left the state statutes on veterans affairs difficult, if not impossible, for service workers and veterans to understand," said Scocos.

At the request of the department, the Joint Legislative Council created a Special Committee to re-codify the statutes related to veterans affairs. Led by Rep. John Townsend (R-Fond du Lac), the 13 committee members included a bipartisan group of legislators, officials from WDVA and the state Department of Military Affairs, and veterans' advocates.

"That bipartisanship has been a hallmark of meeting our veterans needs in our great state of Wisconsin," said Scocos.

The committee was charged with reorganizing the chapter in

a logical manner, renumbering and re-titling sections, consolidating related provisions, modernizing language, resolving ambiguities in language, making other necessary organizational changes, and making minor substantive changes.

Among the changes were a consolidation of the definition of "veteran" and an expansion of eligibility to veterans who remain missing in action, who died as a result of a service-connected disability, and who died in the line of duty in the active or reserve components, including the National Guard. Additionally, the rules for determining future wartime periods were simplified to provide for more rapid approval for state veterans benefits eligibility purposes.

Legislative members of the committee included Rep. Townsend, Sen. Roger Breske (D-Eland), Sen. Ron Brown (R-Eau Claire), Sen. Scott Fitzgerald (R-Juneau), Rep. Judy Krawczyk (R-Green Bay), Rep. Gabe Loeffelholz (R-Platteville), Rep. Terry Musser (R-Black River Falls), and Rep. Marlin Schneider (D-Wisconsin Rapids).

The new law, 2005 Act 22, replacing Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 45, will take effect on Saturday, July 23, before being modified by the budget bill that is expected to be signed on July 25.

WDVA Bulletin No. 713—Effective July 27, 2005 the following statutory changes will become law:

Primary Mortgage Loan and Home Improvement Loan Program

The following information is from <http://dva.state.wi.us/news>

Veteran Home Loan Eligibility Expanded to Certain Guard and Reserve Personnel

Guard and Reserve Personnel who have completed 6 continuous years of service under honorable conditions in the Army or Air National Guard or any Reserve Component of the U.S. armed services are eligible for the Wisconsin Veterans Primary Mortgage Loan and Home Improvement Loan. Eligible Guard Personnel and Reservist must be living in the state of Wisconsin at the time of his or her application for a housing loan benefit. *This extends PML and HILP benefits to Guard and Reserve Members who do not meet the statutory definition of veteran.*

Refinance of Existing Mortgage and HILP Loans Permitted.—Veterans are now able to refinance the balance due on existing mortgage loans used for purchase, construction or improvement of a residence.

Principal Residence Restriction Liberalized.—Loans made under the Primary Mortgage Loan Program and Home Improvement Loan Program can be used for an additional residence. The law no longer requires that the property to be purchased, constructed, improved or refinanced be a person's principal residence, but rather used by the person as a secondary residence. Remaining unchanged is the requirement that one unit of an income producing property (such as a two to four unit residential property) must be occupied as the borrower's principal place of residence.

\$25,000 Cap Eliminated From HILP Program.—The cap has been removed from the veterans Home Improvement Loan Program. Veterans who meet WDVA underwriting criteria may now obtain low interest, fixed rate loans of up to 90% of their home equity for the purpose of improving their residence. Applications for the loan can be made through a County Veterans Service Officer or on the web at www.dva.state.wi.us.

WDVA Bulletin No. 714—Effective July 1, 2005 and with the passing of the state budget, the MFH Stipend Reimbursement Program has been reinstated.

Military Funeral Honors Stipend Program for Veterans Service Organizations

The following information is from <http://dva.state.wi.us/>

We are now accepting applications for the MFH stipend reimbursement from eligible veterans service organizations based on the criteria outlined below.

Stipend reimbursement requests (WDVA Form 2801) received for honors conducted from April 1, 2005 to May 31, 2005 that were not coordinated by the Military Funeral Honors Program, (i.e. no Military personnel involved in flag folding/presentation) must be faxed or mailed to the MFH Program to arrive no later than August 31, 2005 in order to receive consideration for stipend payments. All other stipends received for honors conducted from June 01, 2005 and after, must be received within the 90-day timeframe from the date of honors in order to be considered for reimbursement. For those honors (April 1st and after) that are coordinated by our program, we do not require submission of a stipend reimbursement request, as they will automatically be processed for payment based on the details provided in this bulletin.

The MFH stipend funds are being provided out of the state's tax dollars from the general fund as opposed to the department's trust fund as was done in the past. The primary focus of the Military Funeral Honors Program will continue to be the coordination of honors for eligible veterans followed by processing of stipends based on the timelines listed below.

The MFH Program will continue to work with the branches of military and when available must first use federal funds to incur the current Army National Guard reimbursement (\$35.00) before using state funds to reimburse veterans organizations for providing honors.

1. A stipend will be paid to veterans organizations based on the type of honors they provide: \$25.00 – Basic Honors: flag folding/presentation/Taps. \$50.00 – Full Honors: Basic honors plus a firing detail. \$50.00 – Providing a firing detail and participating with the military in honors coordinated by the MFH Program.

(Continued on page 10 - Bulletin No. 714)

(Bulletin No. 714—Continued from page 9)

2. A stipend will be paid for each funeral honors provided based on available funding. Each county veterans service office and each service organization's state headquarters will be notified of any future funding changes.
3. The stipend reimbursement requests received for those honors coordinated are based on a veteran meeting eligibility requirements for honors. Upon determining eligibility, the stipend will be paid for all honors provided to veterans from all branches of the service, to include Guard and Reserve Members.
4. For honors of Army veterans where a veterans organization participates with the Wisconsin Army National Guard the stipend reimbursement using federal funds will be \$35.00. The Guard will reimburse the veterans organization on a monthly basis. For all other honors that are coordinated by the MFH Program and the veterans organization provides a rifle detail the stipend reimbursement will be \$50.00.
5. Honors coordinated by the MFH Program will be processed weekly for payment and require no documentation or form to be submitted for reimbursement from the funeral director or veterans organization. The MFH Program will during the coordination process use an internal electronic form for stipend processing and certification. Coordinated honors are those honors that are coordinated by the MFH Program where a veterans organization agrees to provide a rifle detail and participate in honors with a military honors team.
6. Honors not coordinated by the MFH Program require a veterans organization to submit a request for reimbursement using WDVA Form 2801, dated 07/05. The form must be received no later than 90 days after the date honors are conducted. Any stipend requests not received within the 90-day period will be denied payment and returned without action. Forms are available on our website at www.dva.state.wi.us, under forms. Note: For honors that are coordinated by the MFH Program do not submit the 2801 form.
7. Stipend requests (WDVA Form 2801) received by mail or fax will be processed quarterly: October, January, April, and June.
8. A veterans organization is responsible for submission of any forms, creating a suspense system and tracking their own payments. It is not the responsibility of a funeral director/home to submit the forms or to follow-up on behalf of a veterans organization. Due to limited time and personnel constraints, the MFH Program must ask that all requests for stipend updates or issues be submitted to the program in writing. A response to stipend issues will be made to a veterans organization in writing or if necessary by phone.
9. A veterans service organization must have completed the MFH Training Program (AP3) and be certified by the MFH Program in order to receive a stipend reimbursement. In addition, a veterans organization must have on file a W9 Form (Taxpayer Identification Number for the veterans organization).
10. A veterans organization should not submit for a stipend nor should a funeral director sign the Stipend Reimbursement Form (2801) if a veterans organization has received any amount of honorarium or donation from the funeral home or a family. A family should never be charged for honors being provided as military funeral honors is considered a federal veterans entitlement and will be performed without cost when either a funeral director or family contacts the department's MFH Program.
11. To coordinate honors and to request military participation, a funeral director/family/veterans organization must contact the WDVA Military Funeral Honors Program at 1-877-944-6667. Upon request the MFH Program will coordinate to provide a two-person military detail whose primary function will be to fold, present the flag and sound TAPS. The MFH Program will then make every effort to locate a local veterans organization to provide a rifle detail.

Other considerations for veterans service organizations and funeral directors arranging or participating in honors:

- ◆ A veterans honor team and military honor team should arrive at the honors location early enough to discuss and coordinate the type of honors that each team will provide. When the military participates they will be prepared to fold and present the flag unless the funeral director has coordinated and instructed otherwise. A veterans organization requesting to assist the military representative in presenting the flag should insure this is coordinated prior to the service and the funeral director has approved.
- ◆ A veterans organization that is planning any other activities other than providing basic or full honors should insure the funeral director and the military honor team are aware of this. Funeral directors should annotate these activities on the honors request form or when coordinating honors. In order to avoid any complaints from families it is

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important that prior to the honors being conducted the family is informed of the type of honors to be provided and any other activities associated with the honors, such as ritual prayers or readings sometimes conducted by veterans organizations.

- ◆ During the folding of the flag and presentation by the military there should be no other activities conducted by any veterans honor team to include drum rolls or readings.
- ◆ The military will arrive prepared to sound TAPS with a live bugler, electronic bugle or CD Player as requested by the funeral director. Veterans groups who can provide their own bugler or electronic bugle are encouraged to do so if available. The funeral director or MFH coordinator should be advised if the additional support is available.
- ◆ For a casket service, military protocol dictates the flag should be draped over the casket. Exceptions to this should be based on a family's decision as relayed to the funeral director. The funeral director should identify this in the coordination process and to those groups providing honors.
- ◆ For a cremation service, military protocol dictates the flag should be unfolded, held open during the sounding of TAPS, refolded and then presented to a family member. Exceptions to this should be based on a family's decision as relayed to the funeral director. For those veterans groups and funeral directors that are uncomfortable with flag folding then contact the MFH Program to coordinate the honors and the military will participate and provide the flag folding function.
- ◆ Problem with Honors: Contact the MFH Program when there is a situation involving a military or veterans organization resulting in problems with the honors being provided. Each situation is addressed back to the headquarters of those organizations for appropriate action to insure the situation is corrected. Questions concerning this bulletin may be addressed to Ken Grant, Bureau Director, Veterans Cemeteries-MFH Program at (800) 947-8387 or (608) 261-0179. SUBJECT: Military Funeral Honors Stipend Program for Veterans Service Organizations

WDVA Bulletin No. 715—

Assistance to Needy Veterans The following information is from <http://dva.state.wi.us/>

With the enactment of 2005 Wis. Act 25 (effective Wednesday, July 27, 2005), the Subsistence and Health Care Aid Grant in their familiar form have ceased to exist. They were replaced by the Assistance to Needy Veterans grant program when Governor Jim Doyle signed the Budget Bill. The department, under emergency rule-making authority, proposed new language to set out the basic rules of the new grant. The language was approved by the Board of Veterans Affairs on July 29, 2005. It was published in the Wisconsin State Journal and became effective on August 2, 2005. The language is temporary and feedback is encouraged. Please collect comments and submit them, in writing, to the department no later than October 7, 2005.

Grant applications received prior to July 27, 2005 will be processed under the old rules with one exception. The authority to issue Certificates of Entitlement (C of E) no longer exists under the new law that became effective on July 27, 2005. Therefore, only one additional certificate will be issued for those applicants who have not received the first C of E and those who have received a first or second C of E. Applicants who are working from their 3rd certificate would have to reapply to get another and such applications can no longer be accepted. The dates on the final certificate will be July 26, 2005 through September 23, 2005. Money is still available to take care of all old applications that qualify. Under no circumstances will the department pay for care received after September 23, 2005 without receipt of a qualifying application for the new program.

Grant applications received on or after July 27, 2005 must comply with the new law. An online application will be available shortly. In the meantime, any request for aid received on or after July 27, 2005, on the old forms, that could potentially qualify, will be logged and processed to the extent possible. You will be notified that the application has arrived and will be provided with additional instructions via e-mail.

Applications received on or after July 27, 2005 that do not comply with the new law must be denied.

The attached document compares and contrasts the old and new programs. This information is as accurate as we can make it based on information available to us at this time.

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PRE ACT 25 PROGRAM

Covers veterans and dependents

No lifetime limit

No income limit

NEW PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH ACT 25

Concentrates on veterans

Covers dependents only of:

- service members killed in the line of duty
- activated or deployed service members

\$5,000 lifetime limit for Subsistence and Health Care grants combined

Most applicants must have income below the federal poverty limit.

Applicants whose eligibility is based on activation or deployment need not have income below the federal poverty limit but they must demonstrate an “economic emergency” that is, a natural disaster which damages the primary residence, a medical emergency, the failure of the sole means of transportation, or a severe disruption in essential household systems caused by a failure of the applicant’s stove, refrigerator, heating system, ventilating and air conditioning system, plumbing system, or electrical system such that it materially compromises the applicant’s ability to live.

Health Care Aid Component

Paid emergency medical care incurred in the past

Does not cover bills incurred in the past

Paid vision, hearing and dental:

Vision \$250

Dental up to \$5,000

Hearing \$1000 per ear

Pays vision, hearing and dental:

Vision \$ 500

Dental \$2500

Hearing \$1500 per ear

All limits are per 12-month period

Same

Future care OK’d for 60 days at a time

Changed to 90 days

Additional 60 days allowed *twice* without a new application

Additional 90 days allowed if justified

Low income applicants were exempt from certain financial requirements

No exemptions

Low Income Exempt limit set by the department

Income limit set by federal poverty guidelines (see chart on page 13)

\$5,000 maximum per 12-month period

Same

Subsistence Aid Component

Pays for subsistence if income is lost due to illness or injury

Same

Special exclusion for PTSD veterans

Exclusion removed.

Provided aid when a disaster, such as fire or tornado, caused severe damage to home

Aid provided when income is lost due to disaster

No limit on grant amount

Limited to \$2,000 per consecutive-12 month period

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FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES (as of February 18, 2005)

Family Size	Annual	Monthly
1	\$ 9,570	\$ 797
2	\$12,830	\$1,069
3	\$16,090	\$1,340
4	\$19,350	\$1,612
5	\$22,610	\$1,884
6	\$25,870	\$2,155
7	\$29,130	\$2,427
8	\$32,390	\$2,699
Each additional	\$ 3,260	\$ 271

The 2005 federal poverty guidelines above were published in the February 18, 2005 Federal Register. The guidelines are updated annually (usually in February) and published in the Federal Register. The annual updates reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). All calculations above have been rounded to the nearest dollar. For further information on the annual poverty guidelines on the web go to <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/03poverty.htm>

We appreciate your patience during this transition.

WDVA Bulletin No. 716—

Veterans Education Grant (VetEd)

The following information is from <http://dva.state.wi.us/>

The purpose of this bulletin is to announce the repeal of statutes regarding the Tuition and Fee Reimbursement Grant (TFRG) and Part Time Study Grant (PTSG) and the introduction of the Veterans Education Grant Program, also known as VetEd. The department, under emergency rule-making authority, proposed new language to set out the basic rules of the new grant. The language was approved by the Board of Veterans Affairs on July 29, 2005. It was published in the Wisconsin State Journal and became effective on August 2, 2005. The language is temporary and feedback is encouraged. Please collect comments and submit them, in writing, to the department no later than October 7, 2005. VetEd is effective for courses completed after July 26, 2005. Listed below are key features of VetEd as it combines and replaces the TFRG and PTSG:

- ◆ Veterans who entered active duty from another state may qualify after 12 months of Wisconsin residency.
- ◆ VetEd will reimburse the tuition and fees paid by the veteran to an eligible school. Reimbursement is currently 100% of the tuition and fees, not to exceed what UW-Madison charges for the same number of credits up to the full-time rate. The percentage of reimbursement may be adjusted periodically based upon demand and available funds.
- ◆ Once a veteran has a bachelor's degree he or she is no longer eligible for VetEd.
- ◆ The veteran must achieve a semester GPA of 2.0 or an average grade of "C" for the semester for which the reimbursement is requested.
- ◆ If the veteran is eligible for the National Guard Tuition Grant (NGTG) or the Reserve Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) they are not eligible for the VetEd; eligibility, not application, is the criterion.

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- ◆ The VetEd establishes a credit bank. The number of credits that can be reimbursed is based on the length of active duty; Active Duty for Training does not count toward department eligibility. Veterans are entitled to 30 credits or two semesters, if active duty is between 90-180 days; 60 credits or four semesters, if active duty is 181-730 days, and 120 credits or eight semesters, if active duty is greater than 731 days.
- ◆ Once a veteran hits the 10-year delimiting date, he or she can bank a maximum of 60 credits for use as a part-time student, i.e., when taking eleven credits or less. However, all other eligibility criteria will apply.
- ◆ Effective for courses in a semester that begins after January 1, 2006 or later, veterans must make a pre-application with the department no later than 30 days after the start of the semester/term.
- ◆ The VetEd application must be received by the department within 60 days after the end of the semester or term.
- ◆ The veteran's family income cap remains at \$50,000, plus \$1,000 for each dependent in excess of two dependents.

In summary, VetEd gives WDVA one grant program for veterans taking courses for credit on a full time or part time basis. Since reimbursement is based on achieving a semester GPA of at least 2.0 or an average grade of "C", the requirement to list individual courses is eliminated. Past usage of WDVA's TFRG and PTSG has no impact on the number of credits the veteran is eligible to be reimbursed under VetEd. Application can be made electronically or by paper and are available via the WDVA website. Once enacted, only VetEd applications will be honored; TFRG or PTSG applications will be returned to the veteran.

Women Veterans Information Fair—Thur. Oct. 13, 2005

The following information was found on the internet <http://www.va.gov>



WHO: Widows, Family Members, and Spouses of Veterans are Welcome

WHEN: Thursday, October 13, 2005

TIME: 11:00 A.M.—7:00 P.M.

WHERE: Spooner National Guard Armory
Highway 70—Spooner WI.



**Admission, Parking &
Refreshments Provided
FREE—of—CHARGE**



*Sponsored by:
AMVETS Dept of Wisconsin and
AMVETS 1st District*

All veterans, widows of veterans, spouses of veterans, and family members of veterans, whether you are still in service or out of service can:

- ◆ Establish eligibility for state veterans benefits—(bring your DD Form 214)
- ◆ Learn about and apply for State and Federal benefits
- ◆ Get help obtaining military medals, records, and enrollment in the VA system
- ◆ Find out about additional state, local, and tribal programs
- ◆ Meet and talk to your local Veterans Service Officer and VA Medical Staff
- ◆ Help you son or daughter in service—learn what they are earning by their service to their country
- ◆ Meet and talk to other Women Veterans, and learn from the their experience

New Exhibits: Photographs & Murals Depict Memories of Vietnam

The following information came from the <http://museum.dva.state.wi.us/>

MADISON— The Wisconsin Veterans Museum is opening two new Vietnam-related exhibits on Monday, July 11, 2005, during an evening reception from 5 to 7 p.m. *Long Shadow: Memories of Vietnam*, and *Flashback: The Vietnam Photography of Dick Swanson* will be housed in separate galleries within the Museum, but they share the common theme of remembering Vietnam and the American men and women who served there. Both exhibits will be on display through December 16, 2005, and both artists will be available for interviews, if scheduled in advance.

Long Shadow: Memories of Vietnam, is a display of brilliantly-colored murals by local artist and Vietnam veteran David Giffey. Giffey was drafted into the war and served as a journalist for the 1st Infantry Division newspaper, *The American Traveler*, during his time in Vietnam. While serving, he took many photographs, and later used them as the inspiration for the murals on display.



Long Shadow highlights the brilliantly colored murals of local artist and Vietnam veteran David Giffey.

Flashback: The Vietnam Photography of Dick Swanson features photographs Swanson took while working as a war correspondent for *Life* magazine. Depicting soldiers in the field, Agent Orange, Hmong refugees and Vietnamese villages, the photos give a clear and memorable representation of the historic events, as seen by soldiers and civilians.

The Wisconsin Veterans Museum is a free public educational activity of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs and is located at 30 W. Mifflin St., across the street from the State Capitol. The Museum is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (year round) and Sundays (April through September) from noon to 4 p.m. The Museum's research center is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and by appointment. For more information contact **Laura Kocum or Charlotte Deleste, at 608-264-7663.**



Flashback features 22 photos taken by Vietnam combat photographer.

Governor Doyle Signs Legislation Creating Gulf War Illnesses Day Also Signs Assembly Bills 18, 46, 79, 107, 261 and Senate Bill 39

The following information is from <http://dva.state.wi.us/>

"Wisconsin is a leader in honoring the service of our veterans and today, with the signing of Senate Bill 193, we will take another step forward in ensuring that the sacrifices of our veterans are never forgotten," Governor Doyle said. "The Gulf War officially began on January 17, 1991 and ended on February 28 of that year. But for many of the men and women who served, the Gulf War continues today. Although most came home and resumed their normal activities, within months of their return many began reporting fatigue, skin rashes, bone and joint pains, cognitive dysfunction, emotional distress, and other symptoms."

A decade after the Gulf War, ques-

tions still persist about illnesses reported by veterans. The underlying causes of the symptoms of Gulf War illnesses are not known but when compared to their non-deployed peers, Gulf War veterans are twice as likely to experience them. About 20 percent of Gulf War-deployed veterans receive some form of disability compensation.

"Senate Bill 193 will establish January 17 as Gulf War Illnesses Day, ensuring that Gulf War veterans who suffer from lasting health problems will receive annual recognition for their sacrifice," Governor Doyle said. "More importantly though, by establishing an annual day of recog-

nition, SB 193 will increase awareness of Gulf War Illnesses and encourage more research so we can determine the most effective form of treatment. It is the first bill of its kind in the nation and I am pleased to sign it into law today."

Governor Doyle thanked authors Senator Brown and Representative Loeffelholz and sponsors Senator Wirsch and Representative Grone-mus for their hard work on the bill.

Governor Doyle also highlighted Assembly Bill 210, which he signed in July 2005.

"AB 210 clearly defines our state's

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commitment to preserving and enhancing benefits for our veterans, Governor Doyle said. “The bill outlines the most comprehensive veterans’ benefits package in the country, and I was pleased to sign it into law. Wisconsin’s veterans, their families, and those who are serving today in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other parts of the world have earned the respect and admiration of our grateful state. We cannot repay the debt of gratitude that is owed to each of them; but we can keep the promises we made to honor their service and sacrifice.”

AB 210 expands eligibility for veteran benefits such as education, tax credits, and health care benefits. The bill expands the definition of veteran to include those missing in action, those who died as a result of a service-related disability, and those killed in the line of duty while on inactive or active duty. In addition, AB 210 allows those who served under honorable conditions in the National Guard or Reserves to receive military funeral honors.

Governor Doyle again thanked Representatives Townsend, Musser, Molepske, Schneider, and Senator Roger Breske, for their hard work in making sure AB 210 got to his desk.

Governor Doyle also highlighted the great work that his Administration, by working with the legislature, has done on behalf of Wisconsin’s veterans over the last two years.

Governor Doyle said that one of the most important things we can do for Wisconsin’s veterans is make sure they can get a great education through the UW-System or one of Wisconsin’s fine technical colleges.

“The budget I signed significantly expands tuition remission, to allow more of our veterans and their families pursue higher education – removing the income cap, and extending the benefit to spouses or children of veterans who were disabled or killed in the line of duty,” Governor Doyle said. “The budget also expands the part-time study program to allow up to 60 credits of part time education – without a time limit.”

Governor Doyle also said that often the physical and emotional stress of losing a husband or wife who was serving causes great financial stress as well. To help lift the tax burden on our veterans and military families, Governor Doyle created a refundable property tax credit for elderly disabled veterans or their surviving spouses. This tax credit allows them to deduct what they pay in property taxes from their income taxes.

Governor Doyle also signed the following legislation today Wednesday, August 17, 2005:

Assembly Bill 18: This bill will increase highway safety by ensuring that trucks that weigh more than 26,000 pounds are equipped with a flashing or rotating amber light. Governor Doyle thanked Representatives Ainsworth and Parisi and Senators Olsen and Lassa for their hard work on the bill.

Assembly Bill 46: This bill will ensure that a coroner may appoint any number of people as deputy coroners and those people do not need to be county residents. This will allow counties to share dep-

uty coroners and the associated training and position costs. Governor Doyle thanked Representative Underheim and Senator Roessler for their hard work on the bill.

Assembly Bill 79: This bill will facilitate regional cooperation by allowing a city or village to abolish its police department if it enters into a contract with the county for the sheriff to provide law enforcement services. Governor Doyle thanked Representatives Musser and Berceau and Senator Leibham for their hard work on the bill.

Assembly Bill 107: This bill will change the cut-off time for receipt of documents for filing and recording with a register of deeds, federal tax lien forms, and maintenance of county highway registers. Governor Doyle thanked Representatives Wood and Gronemus and Senators Olsen and Breske for their hard work on the bill.

Assembly Bill 261: This bill will clarify that digital recordings of a child’s testimony are permitted in criminal proceedings just as videotaped statements currently are. This will help protect children during sometimes difficult court procedures. Governor Doyle thanked Representatives Kleefisch and Boyle and Senator Jauch for their hard work on the bill.

Senate Bill 39: This bill will require the Department of Public Instruction to apply for federal funds that will help Wisconsin school districts buy more environmentally friendly biodiesel fuel for school buses. Governor Doyle thanked Representatives Petrowski and Shilling and Senators Leibham and Wirsch for their hard work on the bill.